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ABSTRACT

In 1981, South Central Community College received funding to develop a long-range planning process. The process was to be modeled on the 3-year planning cycle developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and to use the college's existing organizational structure. Since November 1981, the planning process at the college has been accelerating. A long-range institutional plan was developed using the college's Self-Study Report as the basis for first-year assumptions. A Planning Council was established as the pivotal committee for the planning process. In order to simplify and focus the planning efforts that had been initiated as part of the self-study process, the Planning Council undertook a five-phase process: Phase 1: Review and Appraisal, which examines the role and scope of the college, develops planning assumptions upon which the institution's goals are prioritized, and provides information on the service region, college funding, student profiles, facilities and resources, staffing, programs and services, and governance; Phase 2: Divisional Goals, during which faculty and staff meet with deans and department heads to establish divisional goals; Phase 3: Reformatting, which involves a review of divisional goals and their statement as measurable objectives; Phase 4: Approval by the President; and Phase 5: Renewal of the Process. The broad-based goals and objectives that are articulated in the resulting planning document establish priorities for budgetary expenditures and personnel allocations. (HB)

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INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING AS A PARTICIPATIVE PROCESS: A COMMUNITY COLLEGE SELF STUDY

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Introduction

As monetary cutbacks, shifting educational needs, and financial and programmatic accountability become increasingly significant concerns, a sound basis for decision-making becomes a necessity. As an agency of the State of Connecticut, South Central Community College does not develop its plans independently, but rather must fit within the context of the policies and goals of the Board of Trustees of Regional Community Colleges. It is South Central's responsibility to describe its goals, show how they are of benefit to the region and the State, evaluate its current success in achieving these goals, and provide a basis for estimating the future needs of the people of Connecticut.

The major problem that South Central Community College will face in the remainder of this decade will be scarce financial resources appropriated by the State legislature and administered under the auspices of the Board of Trustees of Regional Community Colleges. Limitations on personnel and financial resources, coupled with increasing enrollment, will make it difficult to effectively maintain and improve institutional quality. If the College is to continue to be flexible with regard to needed programs and services, its various needs will have to be coordinated, documented, justified, and prioritized to effectively use available personnel resources, physical facilities and equipment.

Paper presented at the Eleventh Annual Conference of the Northeast Association for Institutional Research, October 13, 1984, Albany, NY.

The overriding purpose of the Institutional Plan is to provide guidelines for the development of South Central Community College through the 1980's and to serve as the basis for its continued strengthening. The plan is designed primarily to develop the academic and related support areas necessary for both degree and extension offerings needed in the College's service region. This focus is supported by the goals of the Academic Affairs, Student Services, Community Services and Administrative Services Divisions of the College.

1980-1981: The Self-Study

When South Central Community College was preparing for an accreditation visit by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in 1981, it did not have an effective long-range planning process: no detailed planning documents were developed previous to the self-study. Short-range planning, while effective within the various departments or divisions, was plagued at the institutional level by insufficient communication of planning efforts across divisional lines. Funds obtained under Title III (Strengthening Developing Institutions Program) of the Higher Education Act were committed in 1980-81 to implement a long-range planning process. The process would be modeled on the three-year planning cycle developed by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) and would use the existing organizational structure of the College. It was recommended that the self-study be used as the basis for the College's first three-year plan. In future years, information contained in the self-study would be revised by a Planning Council (at that time ad hoc) in light of changing demographic and educational trends.

The Planning Council became a permanent committee of the College in 1981; the concept of the three-year format--specific objectives (year 1); general projections (year 2); and assessing the College's potential (year 3)--is still being developed.

1981-1984: Development of the Planning Cycle

The Planning Council: Since November 1981, the planning process at South Central Community College has been accelerating. In order to meet external deadlines for federal funding, a long range institutional plan--initiated in 1980-81, with the College's Self-Study Report as the basis for first year assumptions--was developed. The Planning Council, chaired by the Director of Institutional Research, Planning and Development, became the pivotal committee for the institutional planning process. Its structure was designated by the president of the College to include an elected, representative body of faculty, non-teaching professional staff, mid-level administrators, classified staff and students and executive management--deans of the College and the Director of Community Services. (The Director of IRPD is also in the management group.)

Although it was created as part of the self-study process, the Planning Council was first convened in Fall 1981 and was confronted with an unwieldy document. This document included all the "objectives" each department or division at the College desired to accomplish under the goals developed during the self-study process. Part of the problem was that departments wanted to accomplish as new objectives many of the tasks they were doing as routine day-to-day functions. A more focused approach would have to be developed.

Phase 1: Review and Appraisal. The Planning Council set itself to the task for which it would become responsible: review the MISSION for the Regional Community Colleges as set out in the State Statutes (public institu-

tions have to cope with this); review the ROLE AND SCOPE of South Central Community College within the context of the Mission (this statement was developed by the College under guidelines prepared by the Board of Trustees); and develop PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS upon which institutional GOALS would be developed and prioritized. The assumptions are based on reports published by the Office of Institutional Research, Planning and Development and include information concerning:

(1) THE SERVICE REGION

(2) COLLEGE FUNDING

(3) STUDENT PROFILE AND ENROLLMENT

(4) FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

(5) STAFFING

(6) PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

(7) GOVERNANCE

Based on a discussion of these planning assumptions, institutional goals were developed: for the 1982-87 cycle there were 11; for the 1983-88 cycle there were 12. It became evident that the development and the accomplishment of so many goals was extremely unrealistic: the Planning Council was establishing goals that were too specific and departments were looking to develop objectives to complete for each goal. During the fall of 1983 discussion in the Planning Council centered around the premise that some goals were really statements of objectives that should be accomplished under broader goals. A review of the assumptions and previous goal statements resulted in the development of six goals statements in the current plan. The Planning Council also realized that these goals were broad enough to carry the College through the rest of the decade; the major emphasis in the planning process now would be

shifted to the divisional level, and to let one division know what another division was doing.

The 1983-84 cycle included an expanded number of participantss in the planning process. The chair of the Planning Council met with the chairpersons of the various standing committees in the College's governance structure to get a different perspective on what needed to be accomplished. The interesting part of these conversations were that they were held from the standpoint of addressing the College's goals from the perspective of Academic Standards, Curriculum and Instruction, Recruitment and Retention, and Governance. The committee chairpersons were also asked to attend the meetings of the Planning Council and provide input.

In true collegial fashion, the goals were thoroughly discussed for clarity and intent. Prioritization was arrived at by consensus.

Phase 2: Divisional Goals. This phase begins with the Deans of Academic Affairs, Student Services and Administrative Services calling meetings of their department heads to discuss the institutional goals. Their task is to meet with their faculty and staffs to develop divisional goals--which become institutional objectives--and the activities for carrying out those objectives. This process takes place at the beginning of the spring semester. During 1983-84, for the first time, the chair of the Planning Council met with the respective deans and their department heads to discuss the assumptions and goals and answer questions about the process. (I was available to meet with individual departments to discuss the development of objectives and budgets.) Department heads are also asked to prepare two year budgets for their departments, including justifications for all new personnel, educational and institutional equipment, and regular line item expenses. This is the blue sky part of the planning process and lasts about two months. Reality, in the form

of the institutional allocation from the Board of Trustee, sets in in mid-June when the College discovers that the funds it receives from the State does not cover the requests for supplies, equipment and professional activities.

Phase 3: Reformatting. The divisional goals are reviewed by the Director of IRPD to make sure they are stated in the form of measurable objectives (rather than daily activities) and prioritized under the appropriate institutional goal for funding (if necessary). Part of the process is the discovery of how much can be (and later must be) accomplished without the immediate expenditure of funds. This is also the phase where the three individual parts are combined into a single institutional document.

Phase 4: Approval. The planning document is then presented to the President for his final review and approval. It should be stated here that the President and the Executive Council are given periodic updates on the development of the plan by the Director of IRPD. According to the approved priorities for institutional objectives, funds for operating expenses and institutional and educational equipment are then allocated to the deans by the President; the deans must then review their priorities for allocation of funds to meet divisional objectives. The document is then distributed to the college community.

Phase 5: Renewal. The process commences again during the fall semester, using changes in the meeting format, the inclusion of different groups of staff or some other combination of factors to increase communication and facilitate the entire process. Revisions are to be expected in the event of changes in the parameters of the planning assumptions or the fulfillment of the stated goals/objectives. I have found it advantageous for me to talk with different groups and constituencies in the College community and to get more groups to talk with each other; this increases the potential of the process

not only being better understood but also meaningful to all concerned. This will probably be the format of the 1984-85 planning cycle.

Conclusions

Planning is a deliberate process; it is done differently in different institutions. It takes its form from the personalities resident in the institution. Planning also is an acquired skill; it is a slow, incremental process. There is no single "right" way to move your organization smoothly toward its objectives--the process involves more art than science--but flexibility and some means of measuring "success" are prerequicites (Linkow, 1983).

In the fall of 1982, all members of the College community were asked to respond to a survey regarding six areas of concern. With regard to long-range planning, fifty-five percent of the survey respondents agreed that long-range planning has involved more College staff throughout the process; however, 70 percent disagreed that the planning process has provided a clear direction for program development, resources management and decision-making. In defense, it is difficult to establish a clear direction when almost 80 percent of the operating budget goes for personnel services and fixed charges.

The College's Planning Council develops the planning assumptions and formulates the institutional goal statements based on the most current information available. This document of assumptions and goals is distributed to the entire College community through the deans and division/department heads. All academic, support and administrative units of the College develop and submit plans for their independent and interdependent needs and activities. The broad-based goals and objectives articulated in the resultant planning document, therefore, establish priorities for budgetary expenditures and personnel allocations at the College. In a time when the requisites of the economy and the job market are constantly changing, the plan establishes

academic as well as support program priorities. While this plan presents detailed actions for the current academic year and guidelines for the ensuing five years, the direction for that period is not inexorably set.

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